

ON ANTI-PLAGIARISM IN AN OPEN UNIVERSITY: CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES

G. Matheou, A. I. Kokkinaki and C. Demoliou

Abstract:

This case study aims to identify perceptions, practices and policies for avoiding plagiarism at a Tertiary Educational Institute in Cyprus that offers all programs at all levels using the methodology of distance learning. For the purposes of this case study, it will be referred as Libre University Cyprus (abbreviated to LUC). We examined how faculty, students and administrative staff at LUC perceive the term plagiarism, what cases of plagiarism have been identified, the tools and techniques followed for identification of plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

All modules at RUC are offered through an eLearning platform (eClass) to which students' assignments and term projects are being collected. Faculty members access the submitted work, provide comments and assign the grade. Students are required to have exams in person and their grade is a weighted average of the work submitted during the semester and the final exam.

In such an environment the issue of plagiarism and academic integrity overall undertakes new, interesting twists. This has been identified by University's bodies and the measures taken are above the national average. Based on interviews with students, we posit that several incidences of plagiarism and academic dishonesty have gone unidentified. If a tutor identifies or suspects a case of plagiarism, the tutor has to inform the module and academic coordinator. The student is invited to apologize for the plagiarism and the penalty depends on the seriousness of the plagiarism. If a student has been proved to plagiarize twice or more, then the case is referred to the Dean and then to the University's Governing Board. The student might get expelled, although no standards have been set and no precedence has been set. The small general paragraph on plagiarism in the University's Rules and Regulations does not provide enough guidance.

Tutors act individually depending on the seriousness of each case. There are cases of plagiarism that have not been reported by tutors. Reported cases may be handled by the Academic Council of the Program of Study and some more severe cases of academic dishonesty are referred to the Governing Board. There was a case that was so serious that the Governing Board decided to expel the student. For less serious cases the penalty the discretion of the tutor and can be reducing the degree or failing the assignment, at hand. In most programs of study, the tutor will decide if he/she will inform the Module Coordinator. On other programs of study tutor has to inform the Module Coordinator, even if the plagiarism is considered minor. There are programs of study that are consistently more flexible with the penalties than others, especially at the undergraduate level.

On conclusion, there are no procedures and standard penalties on plagiarism at LUC. Existing policies and procedures differ for almost every program of study. As a final note it is worth mentioning that there is no national legislation on the topic.